

神野才吉

あそびんぐ！



神野オキ子

あそびんぐ！



Asobi ni Iku yo! - Volume 01 Chapter 00-03

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Lead-in

In the distant universe, [they] were waiting quietly. Over the past six months, a communication had been sent continuously in a certain direction. Moreover, a great number of that planet's 'dialects' were specifically used. However, no response had yet come back. [They] knew that that planet's methods of communication were still limited to radio waves and cables (made with copper or fibre at that), so [they] had sent the message across the entire radio spectrum and went so far as to secretly set up a receiver close to that planet's moon.

Anyone else would certainly have gotten angry at the situation, but [they] were an endlessly *softhearted* bunch and instead began to worry. Was it possible that a world war had broken out? Based on observations, though, while there were some small-scale skirmishes, no war managed to embroil more than 30% of the planet. Once again, [they] looked over the message, but only managed to reaffirm that it was the proper outcome of countless deliberations. After all, it was only a single phrase.

"We want to come play!"

More time went by.

Still, there was no answer.

With worried hearts, [they] gave up knocking on the door that refused to open and, instead, went over to *peek*.

Prologue: A Cat Encountered at a Graveyard

A Cat Encountered at a Graveyard



July 18, 200A – America.

“Bogey 1, radar contact lost.”

“What probable location do we have for its disappearance?”

“Somewhere over Japan.”

“What the... this size and speed, are you sure this data is correct?”

“Yes, obviously the data doesn’t match any of our country’s aircraft.”

“And it definitely braked on its own, right?”

“Yes, it seems so, Major.”

“But Major, we already beat out that red polar bear country, and I doubt that any other country could make something exceeding our American spacecraft...”

“Yes, space is America’s domain.”

“Which means that thing really is...”

“That wireless contact, too, must be...”

A sharp voice shook the radar room.

“This situation is Code 7, top secret classified!”

“Yes, Sir!”



“So hot...”

Under a giant field tent originally from a mobile command army surplus store,

Kakazu Kio was lying on an ordinary vinyl sheet, lazily slurping on a can of cola.

It's summer in Okinawa.

The heat from the blue sea and the sizzling scorched pavement could be felt wafting over the sheet.

Up until the day before, he had been overdoing it playing games, and with a weak body type, Kio couldn't help but be dazed by this kind of heat. In this case, it was something he was thankful for... Being roasted by the sun helped him somewhat to forget the uneasy feeling that kept increasing lately. The shape of this uneasiness was, in fact, anxiety born from the vague future ahead of him. That said, just knowing its true form wouldn't make a difference.

"Hot..." Kio muttered, not wanting to continue his train of thought on this problem.

The golden sunlight streamed down from the horizon as if it wanted to pierce directly through into each pore. Meanwhile, a cool and refreshing breeze gently wafted over from the sea.

The Kakazu family mausoleum, a traditional Okinawan [turtleback tomb](#), was located on a hill as it stood overlooking the ocean. As the name implies, the tomb resembled the outer carapace of a turtle while inside was the abstract representation of a mother's womb. Attached to the tomb was a courtyard roughly the size of an elementary school playground. The Kakazu family was rather big and quite a few had migrated overseas around the time of World War II. Because of this, for so many members to gather at once, a large space was needed.

Today was the anniversary of the fifth head of the Kakazu family's death. The place was lively with a wide variety of young and old, male and female faces around. Full of clamour and noise, the normally solemn air of a grave visit was nowhere to be found. At an Okinawan wake, there is a saying that 'excessive mourning will prevent the dead from passing on', so the sound of laughter will not die down. Even more so, the sonorous sound of a [sanshin](#) was *like to be* heard.

"It sure is summer." Kio muttered to himself with a joking expression. Owing to the high humidity and scorching rays, his sweat had begun running non-stop.

Still, the breeze had kept blowing steadily, so just staying still under the shade of a tree was enough to prevent too much discomfort.

The smell of barbecue wafted over from somewhere as apparently some part of the family had brought in a barbecue set. Someone began strumming on a [sanshin](#) while a somber voice sang a traditional Okinawan folk song to go with the melody. Many different languages, including Japanese, Okinawan dialect, English, Esperanto, Finnish and so on, could be heard floating about as people interacted with one another.

Such varied voices weren't strange to be heard in any way. Not just in the Kakazu family – every Okinawan who had migrated overseas would come back at least once for one reason or another. Sometimes it was their own idea while at other times it was another person who prodded them. No matter the reason, they would always be back at some point.

“Yo, enjoying yourself?”

A hand clapped down on his shoulder.

“Ah, uncle.”

Wearing a bright red Hawaiian shirt and white Bermuda shorts while sporting a lustrous black suntan, a man in his 40's was cheerfully giving off a resplendent smile. He was called Miyagi Yuichi. Despite the name, he was Kio's uncle. The different surname came from the side of his mother who was indeed part of the Kakazu family. Even though this middle-aged man was involved in who-knows-what kind of business, his economic situation was quite good. He also happened to do a good job looking after others, so no one really cared what his work background was.

“Year after year, everyone keeps finding time to get together without getting tired of it.” Kio said in a joking voice.

“Ah well, we don't celebrate the [shimi festival](#), after all.” Holding a disposable plastic cup filled with beer in one hand, Yuichi laughed.

“How's it going, have you gotten used to senior high yet?”

“Ah, more or less.”

Actually, the senior high entrance exam was already like a distant memory. While he was obviously nervous at that time, not to mention burnt out... that's just how life goes.

"In that case, how about a girlfriend? What about that neighbour kid of yours... that girl, Manami-*chan* right?"

"That, it's still too early for that kind of thing." Being embarrassed by the sudden frank conversation, Kio gulped down some cola. "And anyway, Manami-*chan* and I don't have that kind of relationship."

"Why not? She's your childhood friend who even now drops by regularly, isn't that right? It's the [noble path](#), the easy way. Isn't this kind of noble path a popular trope in manga and games these days? The noble path is important you know. A man's victory or defeat depends on their ability to tread upon it. Yep."

"What 'noble path'?" With so much teasing, Kio naturally ended up with a strained smile.

"That's no good! You can always get into the sexy stuff when you're older, but you only have these three years to enjoy that feeling where just holding hands will get your heart pumping."

"Uncle!" Going that far, the boy could see that his uncle was already completely *sloshed*.

"Whether it's chasing skirts or pure sweet love, now's the time for it; now's the time!" Nodding over to somewhere, his uncle smiled. "Hey, like that girl over there, what do you think?"

Kio followed his uncle's finger to where someone incredible was sitting.

"Whoa."

The first surprise was her outfit. Despite it being the height of summer, that girl was wearing a high-necked bodysuit that was made of something like leather or pleather. Her chest was filled to bursting and some sort of metallic belt was wrapped gently around her exquisitely delicate and slender waist. Slender limbs balanced out the package... Besides that, she had a head full of red hair and bangs on her forehead with highlights in them. Her facial features were beautifully arranged. Even if her face was looked at with a critical eye for detail,

she would be a match for those models you find on the covers of magazines. Still...

“Ahh, thank you sooo much.” Holding out a paper cup, she was scratching her head with a smile across her face. That face looked roughly the same age as Kio. To be honest, it looked like someone properly suited for a school uniform. Of course, if this was the extent of it, she would just be a ‘girl with an incredible appearance’, and not what you would call ‘someone incredible’.

After a golden foaming liquid was poured into the cup, the girl in the bodysuit gulped it down in one go. Looking at her throat, something that could only be a golden jingle bell sparkled as it swayed.

“Puhuaa. Delicious!” With a face full of smiles, the girl had two triangle shaped things going ‘twitch, twitch’ on top of her head. No matter how you looked at it, those had to be cat ears. To add to that, her seated backside had something else red and woolly that was likewise making ‘twitch, twitch’ motions. That’s a tail, right?

(Huh, has that kind of toy gotten popular lately?)

While scratching his head roughly, he suddenly realized something.

“Whoa, awesome!” Placing a beer bottle down on the vinyl sheet and clapping his hands, looking very drunk beside the girl, was...

“Dad, what are you doing?”

“Oh, Kio, what’s up?”

No less sloshed than his uncle, it was Kio’s father. This dark, middle-aged man with bushman eyebrows would often hear his relatives sincerely saying, “Thank goodness your son resembles his mother.” He was sitting heavily on the vinyl sheet with a silly grin on his face.

“What do you mean, ‘what’s up?’ What are you doing, giving alcohol to a minor!?”

“Ahh, isn’t it fine? Come on, you drink too.”

“Really, mom’s going to get angry again.”

“It’s fine, today is the anniversary of fifth elder’s death. Go wild, go wild!”

The words ‘go wild’ would not normally be used in typical Japanese society. For some reason, however, it had, in some ways, become the accepted standard in Okinawa.

“Really, when people in our family get drunk, they’re all the same.” Towards the red-headed girl in the bodysuit, Kio sighed and said, “I’m really sorry, they’re bothering you, aren’t they?”

The girl, on the other hand, had a huge smile on her face. “No, no, it’s not like that at all!” she said, shaking her head. Continuing on in fluent Japanese... “This drink tastes great! And this... um, this food, what was it called again?” The girl clumsily pointed with her chopsticks towards the paper plate by her feet with a purple blubbery thing on it.

“Ah, that’s [taimo no dengaku](#).” Yuichi supplemented.



“Right, right, this... dengaku thing is really tasty too, and those [kombu maki](#)... and the [rafute](#)!” Suddenly getting louder, the girl clasped both hands tightly in front of her voluptuous chest while her eyes glittered with sparkles. “So soft and tender, and the [dashi](#) just soaks through! It’s already been so long since I could savour the joy of eating meat, so I’m really, really happy!”

Just like she said, the girl looked really happy with her eyes narrowed... her big eyes turning into slits. Haa, anyone who sees a smiling face like this can’t help but smile themselves. Of course, Kio’s face had a smile on it as well.

(...this girl, where did she come from?)

His head slanted, mulling it over. While her facial features and figure matched

that of a foreigner, her speech was free and easy like a native Japanese person. Not to mention her intonation when saying ‘it’s been so long since I had meat’ – no matter how you thought about it, it didn’t sound like just the past couple of days were involved. Rather, it carried the feeling that she hadn’t eaten meat in a serious length of time, like one or two months.

(Maybe she’s Russian...?)

As far as Kio could reason out, a white girl who would come to Japan and be able to speak Japanese like this could only be from that country, at least on today’s Earth. Anyway, when the entire Kakazu family was brought together, there were more than a thousand people. If one or two had originally immigrated from the Soviet Union, it wouldn’t be strange.

“Uh, let’s see, I’m Eris.” The girl got up in front of the boy and introduced herself, swiftly bowing her head. Standing up, the girl was pleasingly tall. She gave off a light, sweet fragrance and two ripe juicy peaches jumped in front of his eyes.

“Ah, he-hello, I’m Kio.” Kio hastily got up too and bowed his head.

(Ah, definitely a foreigner)

While vaguely thinking that...

“Oh, that’s right, it’s ‘[three cups for latecomers](#)’, I’ve heard, so drink up.”

Breaking through his thoughts with exquisite timing, the girl had at some point grabbed a bottle in her hand and tilted it toward his cup.

“Ah, OK, OK.”

Hurriedly downing what was left in his paper cup, Kio accepted the contents of the bottle and drank it up. After finishing the drink, Kio noticed two things. First, what the girl was holding was a beer bottle. Second, he was a bit of a lightweight when it came to alcohol and he had stayed up all night yesterday. As he realized these things, Kio became dizzy, like the earth and sky were revolving around him. Then he started collapsing on the spot.

(Ah, no good... I’m definitely going to end up getting a bump.)

While his brain felt like the world was going round and around, a short thought

flashed through Kio's mind.

(I sure hope I don't break a tooth or anything...)

He was already unable to recognize anything in front of him.

"Waaa!" A voice came through from far away. Just as he felt something warm against his face, but before he could recognize it, Kio lost consciousness.

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Chapter 1: I Asked, Who Are You?

I Asked, Who Are You?



July 24, 200A – Within the *Galactic Trader 5* online game.

Inside the computer monitor, accompanied by the doleful sound of a bell ringing at the stroke of 12, half-head-half-body-sized cartoon characters trampled over the grass as they gathered around an object inlaid with a plaque marking it as the “A. C. Clarke Monument”.

In the tradition of a certain evil American society, they were all dressed in white pointy hats with holes for their eyes and long white robes going down to their ankles. The object stood there quietly at 3.5 metres tall and 1.56 metres wide. Its depth, too, conformed to the exact ratio of 1 to 4 to 9. Standing in a circle around the slab made of obsidian (per the game settings), they softly touched its surface one at a time and recited a brief ‘prayer’.

Having accepted the ‘prayer keyword’, the caricatures disappeared as the screen blanked out. In their place, an interface came up for a fully closed private group chat room.

«What’s happening?» one of [them] muttered.

«If it was just the *National Inquirer* then fine, but it even hit *The New York Times!*»

«What a horrible situation.»

«This is bad.»

The hooded character with the highest seniority spoke out.

«What does the Japan branch have to say?»

«I’d like to make a plea.»

The icon showing a Japanese flag flashed indicating that a new participant had

entered the chat room.

«This is a grave situation. We need to collaborate globally.»

Careful words lined up without a single error or typo.

«Regarding this collaboration, is it resources you need?»

«That is correct.»

«In that case, we can supply intelligence and personnel...»

«You have my thanks. I'll contact you via email to work out the details. Well then, all for the sake of a beautiful contact.»

The member from Japan gave off a rushed feeling. Japan and America have a time difference of 13 hours, so while it was midnight here, it was afternoon over there.

A message along the lines of 'lunchtime is almost over' went around the chat room.

None of the organization's members had high positions where they could freely squander away their time. As a result, everyone quickly expressed their consent... moreover, none displayed the self-centred attitude typically attributed to the American stereotype.

«Ah, yes, all for the sake of a beautiful contact.»

«For a beautiful contact.»

«For a beautiful contact.»

«For a beautiful contact.»



“...having said that, this message seems to have been transmitted simultaneously worldwide... so then, might this be real?”

Broadcasting on the TV was the sort of mysterious event story befitting early morning summer vacation television. Despite that, Kinjou Manami had something even more important going on... it related to Kio being brought back

drunk last night, and the ‘bonus giveaway’ that came with him.

In any case, she washed her face and combed her hair, applied a light-coloured lipstick over her lips, pulled on an oversized t-shirt over her tube top bra, wore a denim skirt to cover her lower half, and finally strapped on her sandals once she was out at the front entrance.

Briefly, she took a glance at the Baby-G watch wound around her wrist. Despite some leftover scratches from falling off her bike last year, she was very fond of it. Today, too, the exact time was being carved out on its face.

“Manami~!” Her mom’s voice called out from the kitchen.

“Where are you going?”

“Hmm? I’m heading over to Kio—*chi*’s, do you need something?”

“While you’re at it, would you mind bringing the somen noodle stir-fry over there with you?”

Looking over, she noticed a warm plastic container sitting on top of the shoe cabinet. The inside was packed to the brim with somen noodles, vegetables and canned tuna fried in oil.

“You made this again?”

Speaking in a way peculiar to those from Okinawa, Manami couldn’t help but frown as her voice rose slightly on the last syllable. When Manami’s mother told her to bring some food over to Kakazu Kio’s house next door, she would know right away what that day’s breakfast and lunch would be at her place too.

“That’s because granny from Shizuoka gave us too much somen!”

Sighing at the conviction in her mother’s voice, Manami left the house with the plastic container under one arm.



“.....”

A hangover always made Kio feel like he was in some movie. Barely able to remember the last few seconds after he drank, morning and evening had already

passed by the time he regained consciousness... It made him feel like he had ‘frittered away yet another day’.

Right now, he found himself at home on his bed. Shaking around his still muddled head, Kio raised himself up, using his finger to readjust the glasses on his face which had slipped down. Looking at the clock, he could see that it was 9 – and morning, from the look of brightness outside

Kio pricked his ears to see if he could hear anything. There were no random noises banging about, so it was clear that his father and mother had already left for the airport. His father worked as an agent at a local business with close ties to big partner companies on the mainland, so for the past several years, he had been living in Tokyo together with Kio’s mother. The plan was still for them to stay there another two years.

(Aww man, I didn’t get the chance to say goodbye.)

He felt a little bit guilty.

“...hup.”

Keeling over from one cup of beer was pathetic, even with his weak constitution. Sighing reflexively, he tried to sit down cross-legged and his left knee wound up at the edge of the bed. He had apparently been sleeping quite close to it.

“...huh?” Noticing a strange soft feeling coming from his right knee, Kio slowly shifted his head to look at what was lying there. Instead of the usual cotton blanket, a white sheet was covering a large bulge.

“...hmm, what’s this?” The boy’s tongue still felt like cotton as he muttered while trying to move away the sheets. As he did, something red appeared out from all the white.

“?”

Trying to find out what exactly it was he was looking at, Kio stretched out his hand to touch it. The red portion was soft and warm while feeling silky as well.

“Mn... mew.”

Giving off a kind of moan, the body turned itself over. As the sheet jostled

around, two long legs stuck out and stretched themselves into the open. Meanwhile, triangular parts sticking out of the red area sprang up and started twitching. Another long red portion came out from between the legs, curling around and making what looked like beckoning motions.

“!”

Kio’s mind suddenly connected what was with him on his bed: that glamorous red-haired girl with cat ears and a tail. The white sheet, as he could see now, was actually a shirt she was wearing. To top it off... that seemed to be the only thing on her. At the base where her tail was jutting out, there was clearly nothing but smooth skin to be seen.

“~~~~~!” With a silent yelp, Kio *literally* fell out of bed. Landing with a thump, his head hit the wooden floor loudly. Unfortunately, the alcohol did nothing to dampen the sensation, so the boy could only hold his head in pain.

“Mew?” Possibly due to the sound or vibrations, the girl woke up making the most obvious sound anyone could imagine for someone sporting cat ears and a tail. Slowly, she sat up on the bed.

“Oh, Kio–*san*, good morning...” A smile floating across her still drowsy face as the redhead nodded to him.

“Uh, you, that, why... owww!” Holding his head, Kio gave out a cry. Maybe because of hitting it so hard, every little noise made his head ache.

The girl looked worriedly at him... “You hit your head? In that case, please hold on a moment.” With those words, the redhead with cat ears grabbed the metal belt by her pillow and opened up a pouch attached to it. From inside, she took out a small, roundish device that looked like a flip phone. Once out, she opened it up and switched it on.

“Please move your hand for a second.” The girl moved the device near Kio’s head as she spoke to him. Immediately, the device let off cute, electronic beeping noises. The girl’s face got closer as she looked at the display on the device.

“Ahh... then, just to make sure...” she said, hitting a different switch. A whiny sound like a high-pitched motor rang out. Regaining his wits, Kio could feel that

the pain in his head had gone away. “I was afraid there might be hemorrhaging, so I did some quick medical treatment.”

“Ah, thank you...?” While brain hemorrhaging was likely pushing it, the pain had certainly gone, so Kio went ahead and gave her his thanks. However, noticing how the shirt opened up, two soft and vibrant mounds jumped in front of his eyes causing him to quickly avert his gaze.

“Is something the matter?” Without a hint of hostility, sarcasm or humour, the girl asked him earnestly.

“Ah, that, your chest, fasten the buttons... or rather, why are you in my bed!?”

“Uh, please give me a moment... um, uh.” Pulling the sides together, the girl clumsily did up the front of her shirt before answering the question. “It’s because, when I asked your parent’s about it, they just said, ‘sleep wherever you’d like.’”

“Oh. You know, if that was the case, why didn’t you wake me? Then I could have slept on the sofa in the living room...”

“Why do that?” The girl tilted her head with a blank look on her face.

“Why, why you ask... it, it’s because a man and a woman, that, in a room together, might cause a mistake...”

“A mistake?” The girl’s head tilted even more in confusion. With things popping into his head as he tried to explain them, the boy immediately shook his head to clear it.

“Ah, anyway, I, I’m going to use the toilet. Make sure you change while I’m gone!”

“Oh, OK...?”

Kio left in a rush, grabbing and closing the door behind him.

“That girl... really, what’s up with her?” he sighed while muttering. Just then, to compound matters, the entry chime rang. A bad premonition swept down across Kio’s back.

“Kiiiio—kuuun!” In a loud voice that bounced through the corridor, the girl he most dreaded coming over in this situation announced her presence.



“Hmm.” Getting down off the bed, the redhead with cat ears and a tail looked around restlessly, checking out her surroundings. Pulling out a different machine than the one she had used previously from her belt, she pointed it around. “Oh... plastic resin and soft vinyl.” Game figurines were lined up on a shelf. After seeing the plastic model readings, the girl looked hard at their figures. “So detailed... how amazing...”

What particularly drew the girl’s attention was a figurine of a cat under a [kotatsu](#) poking its face out of the futon with its eyes closed and a kitten lolling around next to it on the floor. Maybe it was the accuracy of the models and their paintwork, or the technology used to manufacture them, but no matter which piece she looked at, they were all wonderfully meticulous and delicate.

“The commander, the analysis chief, the professor... wouldn’t they all be delighted to see these...” The girl’s eyes narrowed while poking the kitten with her fingertip. “...but, I want you too, you know.” Her face happy, the girl softly caressed the kitten’s head with her pinky.

That aside, if the people involved in making these products ever found out that even space aliens admired their work, it would be interesting to see what kind of faces they would make.



Using it as an alarm clock for Kio, or perhaps just out of habit, the Kakazu’s living room television was always turned on in the morning. Manami had been sitting at the entrance for a while watching it.

Tap-tap-tap-tap! With a stiff smile obviously plastered on his face, Kio came down from the second floor. “Good, good morning!”

“Mm, good morning!” Smiling pleasantly, Manami immediately followed up with words that felt brandished like a knife. “So, where’s the girl who came back with you yesterday? Introduce me!”

In an instant like the spark from a chemical reaction, Kio’s face stiffened up.

“N...”

“Hey, what kind of girl is she?”

“Ah, nah, no, that, she’s a little strange... no, that is, there, there’s no girl... no, there is, but, I mean, that is to say...”

“Ahh” Manami’s hand clapped down on his shoulder. “So *that* was it, I understand!”

“Huh?”

“If it’s *that*, then it can’t be helped.”

“Huh?”

“That’s right, that’s right. Good for you Kio-*chi*.”

“Um, Manami-*san*,” the boy cautiously directed a question at the girl he had grown up with, “what are you implying?”

“What? You must have been all passion and excitement and *tres bien* and *c’est si bon* all night, stuff like what can’t be written about in this book. So then, Kio-*chi*, being kind, has come down to prepare some morning coffee for the girl who’s still slumbering away.”

“...”

With a face full of curiosity, the girl stared at the boy who had gone completely silent.

“What’s the matter?”

“...why are you being so vulgar?” Being hit with her over-the-top and wild expressions seemed to have sobered him up. However, Manami kept right on going without being phased.

“Ah, how rude! You’re the vulgar one with all your *tres bien* and *c’est si bon*.”

“You’re just fantasizing!”

“Ahahaha~♪ I’m just joking with you!”

“...so, what are you doing here?” Kio asked with distrust in his eyes.

“Ah, here. Uncle and the rest left already, right?” The girl took the plastic

container from under her arm and shoved it in front of Kio. "It's breakfast."

Even though Kio returned a sullen expression, Manami pretended like she didn't notice it.

"Come now, just take it, is what I'm saying."

"...you're sure in a good mood." Heaving a sigh, Kio calmed down somewhat and let it go.

The so-called 'childhood friend' in games and comics were normally kind and reserved, the kind who would back you up from behind or maybe come over every morning to help you get up. No matter how you looked at it, though, Manami was not that kind of 'childhood friend'. She stood overwhelmingly above Kio. In front of that girl, rather than a childhood friend, it might be better to call Kakazu Kio a well-manufactured toy, or a little brother used as a toy standin.

Though it didn't quite reach the level of bullying, she would always mock or push him around whenever she came over... Well, as neighbours for the past 10 years, the scene constantly showed Manami making her unreasonable demands and Kio running back and forth. The sole relief came from it only being like that when the two were alone. As long as there was a third party, this kind of situation would definitely not happen and Manami wouldn't tell anyone about it either. Because of that, Kio was afforded a respite during that harshest of times in a person's life: middle school. Even so, it was a far cry from being worthy of thanks.

"Well, that's how it is. It's the difference between a person with a clear goal in mind and one who spends every day goofing off." Laughing proudly, the girl puffed out her chest. Her chest, which could be considered top in her class, shook with the movement.

"I feel like that's not the issue here, though." Normally, with that happening, Kio would have turned away as his face became red. This time, though, he strangely enough looked straight at Manami with protest in his eyes.

"Boo... Kio, you've gotten tougher." Noticing a slight difference in tone, Manami tilted her head.

“Anyway, head back already. I’m busy too, you know.”

After she had shrunk back a bit, these words caused Manami to flare up again.

“What did you say!?”

“Uhh...”

Suddenly, from the upper floor, the foreigner girl with red hair fluttering down to her hips came down the stairs. Moreover, those were cat ears and a tail attached to her. With a bare body (since there was likely nothing underneath), she had nothing more than a shirt on (a men’s shirt – probably one belonging to Kio’s father considering how big it was).

“May I interrupt for a moment?” Softly bending her torso, she poked out between Kio and Manami while the chest portion of her shirt swayed back and forth. It didn’t ‘shake’, it ‘swayed’.

“!”

Feigning innocence was useless at this point where no excuses, retorts and, of course, deflections could be made.

(Hahh...)

All sorts of retorts and ridicule flashed through Kio’s mind flying out of Manami’s mouth. Preparing for them, his eyes closed automatically. In the end, though, there was nothing.

“?”

Not just Kio, Manami, too, was frozen stiff. However, the reason behind it was different.

“Fo... foreign goods...” The slightly mortified words in Manami’s outcry were not picked up by Kio’s ears, but the voice itself managed to bring him back to his senses.



“Wha, what are you doing! Please get dressed!”

“Well... that’s just it.” The read-headed girl answered as her cat ears niggled on top of her head. “I left my suit downstairs... it’s OK for me to go get it, right?”

“Ah, no, yeah, I see. That, that’s fine.” Nodding like a rusty robot, the red-faced Kio quickly turned around.

“Then please excuse me.” Swiftly bowing her head, she then went around behind Kio, her bright red hair flowing like water over her cat ears and tail. With another quick nod to Manami, she finally disappeared into the bathroom.

“.....”

A heavy silence fell between the boy and the girl.

“...pervert.” Manami finally cut through it with a quiet voice, cold eyes turned unhesitatingly toward him. However, it wasn’t the sort of harassment she normal directed at Kio, but rather a pure girls contempt.

“It, it’s not what you think!” the boy hastily denied, shaking his hands wildly in front of him. Obviously, words like that would never be enough in this kind of situation.

“Hey, now, what do you mean, ‘it’s not what I think’? ...no matter how much you love your games and comics, putting cat ears and a tail on Miss Foreigner there, someone you don’t even know... not to mention doing this and that with her... how are you not a pervert?”

“It’s not like that!” Kio cried out seriously. “You’re completely wrong,

Manami–*chan*. Did you not see it properly? Both of those are growing from her body!”

Silence, *yet* again.

In the midst of a sigh, Manami crafted her words carefully in order to persuade him. “Stop it with your bad excuses. In what world would you find a human with cat ears and a tail growing from them?”

“...but she does have those. I mean, what am I supposed to say?”

“You’re sticking with that story? ...come on Kio, it’s fine for you to like anime and manga, but you need to stop mixing them with reality.” Her words were very much grounded in reality. For that reason, going against her thinking was rather troublesome.

This time, it was Kio’s turn to sigh. “Manami–*chan*, please face up to reality...”

“What! The one who’s escaping from reality has no right to say that! You even went so far as to make her stay in that perverted getup all night!” Manami’s anger finally broke out, causing him to glare right back at her.

“That’s just your imagination running wild!”

“They’re not just some delusions, it’s obvious from common sense and the facts in front of me!”

In this kind of situation, the childhood friend ‘boy and girl’ dynamic easily switched to a no holds barred standoff. As things came to a head, continuous sparks flew between the two and the huge final explosion... was just about to come.

Suddenly, the front door slid open.

“Kakazu–*kun*!” Together with the sharp sound of the sliding door banging into its frame, in came a woman with a severe look on her face. Around 22 or 23, wearing glasses and a sharp suit, she conscientiously combed through her chestnut-coloured hair. “What was being said just now, is it true?”

While her features were well arranged and her style quite good, her black rim glasses and vintage-style grey suit made her entire body radiate ‘diligence’, as if it was a facet she made a part of everything in her life. It was a style where,

rather than good looks, it was her clothes that gave off a striking impression.

“Ah, Itokazu—*sensei*.” In that instant, Kio tensed up while Manami immediately erased the obvious combative expression she had on her face.

This woman’s name was Itokazu Maki. She was their classical literature teacher at the Makishi High public senior high school. Incidentally, Kio had an additional connection to her since she was also the adviser to the film club he was in.

“Teacher, why are you here?”

“I’m here to discuss next week’s training camp... I mean our ‘on location’ trip. I told you, right?”

“Ah!” With that, Kio got it.

“But, right now, this teacher thinks that what Kinjou—*san* was talking about a moment ago is more important.” Squiggly veins throbbed next to her temples. Written all over her face, it obvious how desperately she was trying to maintain her calm facade.

“Ah, but, those were just Manami—*cha*... I mean Kinjou—*san*’s wild delusions!”

“Well, Kinjou—*san*?”

“Umm... err... that...”

Honestly speaking, as a teacher among the girls at the school, Itokazu Maki’s reputation was terrible. Not only was she a complete square and a stickler for rules, even though she was obviously Okinawan, she wouldn’t use the dialect at all. She was always about the reasoning and logic to the point where jokes meant nothing. However, when she was trying to fit in with the students, she would sometimes try to display an uncharacteristic understanding or approving attitude (a smile-inducing mistake common among new teachers) making them *cringe* as well.

More importantly, ever since this female teacher became their advisor, the film club Kio was in had gotten into bad shape. Knowing this, Manami had no good feelings about her. However, what was being denied up to this point was no laughing matter.

“Uhh, umm.” At last trying to collect her thoughts, Manami threw out some

quick words. “That is, it’s *that*, you know? Like a way to heat up the conversation.”

“But all I could hear was you two at each other’s throats.”

“Well, that is, you know, teacher, like a childhood friend thing. Sometimes, once the conversation gets heated, it’s hard to put on the brakes...” Talking in a monotone, Manami’s absent-minded excuses fell flat from her mouth.

“But, Kakazu–*kun* *did* spend the night under one roof with someone of the opposite sex, right? And in a situation where neither your father nor mother are around...”

“No, no. Both my parents were here. Up until this morning, that is.” As Kio frantically tried to explain, Maki looked askance over her round framed glasses at him with an ‘or so you say’ look.

“Anyway, let’s have a talk with the party in question.” With a face that left no room for discussion, Maki put down her decision.

“Umm...” With impeccable timing, the face of a girl with red hair, cat ears and a tail came out. “Kio–*san*, is this okay?”

Covered head-to-toe in a skin-tight bodysuit, her tall, splendid body-lines and proportions were fully on display, making it even more sexy than if she were nude. She had a wide metal belt fastened around her waist and her cat ears and tail could be seen twitching back and forth.

“!”

This time, it was Maki’s turn to freeze.

“Ka... Kakazu–*kun*!” Grabbing down on the boy’s shoulder, she pointed her other hand at the red-haired girl. “You’re just a senior high school student, yet you dare do something so shameless! *That*, what’s with *that*!?”

“Um. I’m not a thing, you know...”

“Oh, I, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean you, I meant *those things* on your head and bum.”

“?”

“Having an illicit sexual relationship is a problem on its own... but you’ve gone too deep with your anime and games!”

“No wait, teacher...”

“I think I would be better off not mentioning this to the school, so during summer vacation, with your parents...”

“Hey, that, I didn’t do anything. Her ears and tail were there from the start.”

“Don’t make fun of grownups!” At the anger in Maki’s voice, Kio instinctively leaned his head back. “Even though school life can be harsh at times, trying to escape like this won’t help. Do you understand? Didn’t this teacher say it before? There are many wonderful things in this world.” Maki repeated the same things Manami had been saying up to this point.

Blocking Kio from responding, the diligent female teacher continued on with her ‘lecture’. “You need to properly see the difference and understand what’s real.” As the teacher desperately tried to make her case clear to Kio, the anger receded from her face, replaced with a slight compassion.

“You need to look at reality from the right angle. Certainly, genetic engineering has made some progress, but tampering with the human genome is still out of reach. Even imagining the technology was there, this kind of thing would still be unreasonable. This girl looks to be from a foreign country, so there might be many reasons for her to wear that kind of costume, but, essentially those are still just costume parts...”

“Oh, but these are real.” The redhead girl nodded her assent.

“You’re also a fan of Japanese anime?” Maki cried out desperately. “Um, would you please come back to reality. I don’t care how well-made or special those cat ears and tail are, don’t lose your sense of reality. Kakazu Kio—*kun* as well, don’t turn your back on reality.”

“If you don’t believe me, then here...” With quick motions, the girl leaned over, took Maki’s hand and brought it to one of the ears on top of her head

“.....huh?” Letting out a noise, Maki’s face showed an astonished look as she touched, pulled and fondled the ear.

“See, look. They’re real, aren’t they?”

Maki, engrossed in stroking the cat ear, immediately returned to her senses, suddenly shaking off the girl’s hand and flying backwards. “Who... what are you?”

With a smug look on her face, the girl puffed out her chest in satisfaction. The two hanging fruits inside her tight bodysuit jostled as the golden bell glittered underneath her throat. “Yes, I’m an alien from outer space. For the sake of investigating earth, I came to play!”

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Chapter 2: The House Guest Had Cat Ears

The House Guest Had Cat Ears



Earth Calendar, July 25, 200A – In the vicinity of the solar system.

“Ah!”

Inside the vast hangar, a panicky voice rose up. “Argh, that stupid Eris. She forgot to bring food.”

The one speaking was a space alien with cat ears and a tail poking out. However, contrary to Eris, this one’s stature was along the lines of a ‘shorty’. Standing at only half the height of Eris, her body could be described as underdeveloped. Earring-like yellow tag markers dangled both from her main ears located at the parietal ridge and her auxiliary ears on the sides of her head. These tags identified her as having permanent gene control nanomachines inside her body while at the same time indicating that she had some sort of special ability.

The silver ‘jingle bell’ at the base of her throat provided proof of her being an important figure inside the warship. For any of her colleagues, just seeing how young she looked and yet how high a position she was in would most certainly engender a rather pure respect for her... No matter how it’s put, their society was one where ‘hard work and effort’ were ordinarily defined as *an awful chore*, resulting, of course, in this kind of reaction.

“Chaika, what’s the matter?” Another person, this one a colleague with silver hair, called out to her while nimbly springing her way across the floor of the hangar. During an emergency, this person would become an active member of the landing team, so the bell dangling at her neck was was half silver, half gold.

“Eris, *that fool*, took the food out during her final checks but forgot to put it back when she was leaving for Earth.”

“Ah...” The silver-haired alien carried an air of refinement while her ‘laid-back’ atmosphere was even more intense than Eris’s. “Send them off immediately.”

“That would be pointless. It’s already been a week. At this point, if she hasn’t managed to handle it on her own, she’ll have starved to death.”

“Don’t say it like that.”

“I’m just joking.” The brown-haired cat-ear girl known as Chaika puffed out her perfectly flat chest. “It being Eris and all, I’m sure she’s come up with something clever. She has that sort of skill after all.”

“Are you sure ‘skill’ is the right word?”

“Huh? Having good luck or bad luck, being able to push through to the end should definitely be considered a skill.”

“Hmm.” Resting her index finger on her cheek, the silver-haired cat-ear girl considered the situation. Not being able to come up with an answer, her thoughts immediately pointed in a different direction. “But, talking about self-sufficiency here, that means she won’t have to eat food from the Soylent Green synthesizer, huh?”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Chaika nodded.

“How nice... basking in starlight, eating natural foods from nature’s plants and animals...” the silver cat muttered with a dreamy look in her eye. “Birds, fish, plants, reptiles, mammals... no doubt they’d all be tasty...”

“Mmmm...” Maybe imagining the same thing, Chaika, too, looked up at the vastness of space, an entranced look on her face.

The food synthesizer could already more or less match the outward appearance and flavour of the real thing. However, there was always a distinct ‘uncomfortable flavour’ to synthesized food that couldn’t be done away with. Not to mention, these girls had already spent a long time as ‘sailors’ on this interstellar spaceship. They had eaten synthesized food to the point where they could tell its every difference in nuanced detail and were fed up with it. From what these girls understood, with the unknown lifeforms there being so similar to themselves... or rather, having a planet where such creatures that were almost the same as them could exist, there must be many things they could eat.

It was literally an ‘undiscovered world of flavour’.

“There must be cuisine we’ve never seen...”

“There’s got to be candy we’ve never seen...”

Having the same thoughts, they spoke in unison. “How nice...”



When his mother’s cell phone was picked up on the second ring, he asked, “So, what should I do?”

«It’s fine, Kio. Just let her stay for now.» Kio’s mother gave him, the entire family’s pillar of conscience and common sense, an off-the-cuff answer.

“That, you’re saying it’s fine...!?”

«Well, I actually spoke with her yesterday.» Apparently his mother had aimed at being a voice actress when she was young but had to give it up because her accent kept slipping. However, her ‘mainland accent’ just now was flawless to the point where that story seemed like a lie. «She seems like a nice girl... Manami-*chan* next door is pretty nice too, but for something like this, there’s a whole world out there that I think would be good for you to see and experience.»

“You, what are you imagining!?”

«Dad also seems to think highly of Eris... More importantly, all the head grannies of the Kakazu family think highly of her too.»

“Huh?” Kio stared dazedly into the handset.

The so-called “head grannies of the Kakazu family” were 3 old ladies from the main branch on the Kakazu family’s gatepost. Their names were Nabe, Kamado and Ushi. (Nowadays, these names which mean ‘pot’, ‘stove’ and ‘ox’ respectively may be surprising, but it was common back then to name daughters after the family’s valuable belongings.) Having long since passed 100 years old, the three were still robust and full of vigour. Even now, they still operated an [Okinawa soba](#) shop together in Shuri, Naho, as well as a side business as exclusive Okinawan psychics – each a so-called “[yuta](#)”. There was a part of the

family that found them *frightening* to the point where they *refused* to look them in the eye, but Kio, for some strange reason, was much loved by them. Regardless of what was going on, they would always come and show their concern for him.

“Is that true?”

«Uh-huh, yeah... Grandma Nabe was even quite eager and said something like, ‘This girl should definitely stay with Ki-*bou*.’»

Incidentally, Ki-*bou* was their pet name for Kio.

“.....wasn’t she just someone dad brought home when he was drunk?”

Whenever Kio’s father got drunk, he wouldn’t hold back at all and ended up bringing random things back with him before the following day. From something as small as some pub’s beer chest to something as big as the mascot doll or cutout in front of a pharmacy, he would bring anything back home. Each year he even had a history of bringing up to two wandering hobos back home with him. Once, he ran across a sympathetic US marine soldier and, despite babbling incoherently to them, ended up causing a small disturbance by bringing back the whole platoon – equipment and all.

«Well, obviously, right? Though, generally, your mom wouldn’t allow something like this.»

“Well, yeah...” While he now understood what had happened, there were still some things that Kio just couldn’t get around. “Okay, but... did you not consider the bad influence it might have in educating your child?”

«What’s this child saying.» Cheerful laughter could be heard through the handset. «How old do you think your mom was when she gave birth to you?»

“...”

«Ah, but, you know, forcing yourself on her is absolutely no good. You need to be in complete agreement, just like your mom and dad were. Without love, you’ll go sterile.»

“Um... the partner’s an alien, you know?”

«What’s wrong with that? Love can easily start as a game of tag, regardless,

even if it's the fate of the Earth that's at stake.»

“...?” The boy cocked his head, immediately getting a grasp on the situation. To sum up, for the next little while, it seems he would be living together with the cat-ear girl. With this and that going through his head, he immediately pinned down the most important issue. “...um, what about money?”

«Ah, don't worry about it. We'll deposit some extra. About eighty thousand yen more should be enough, right?»

“...that's fine. Later then.”

After replacing the handset, the redhead cat-ear girl immediately peered hopefully at Kio's face. “So, then, how did it go?”

“Yeah, it's fine. They say you're welcome to stay here for now.”

“I see.” Relieved, the girl patted her chest lightly with a sweet smile on her face.

At first returning the smile automatically, Kio suddenly remembered the incident that had happened just a few minutes earlier. Then, thinking of all the things he would have to deal with going forward, he felt just a little bit lost.



Moving time back a bit...

“A-an alien!?” Itokazu Maki's voice shook the house. “Don't, don't be stupid! Where in the world would you find an alien with that kind of form!? It's the *21st century* already!”

Certainly, in present-day Japan... no, anywhere in the whole world, any person seeing this girl would likely raise a similar angry shout.

“I was initially surprised as well.” replied Eris, the red-haired girl with cat ears and a tail, as she nodded in agreement. “Upon seeing all of you, we at first thought that it must be some kind of joke. We were stuck at the outer planets for three years while the council kept arguing about it over and over.”

“That, that's nonsense!”

“No, really, that’s what I thought too. I mean somehow, in this area, we can even communicate without a translation device.” Nodding *vigourously* with her arms crossed, it was impossible to tell whether or not the girl really understood what Maki was upset about.

“...” Grinding her teeth to the point where you could hear them gnashing against each other, Maki had a terrible expression on her face as she glared at Eris.

“Huh? Is something the matter? Umm...”

Having a bad feeling that Eris’s follow-up words to Maki might cause something, Kio jumped in to help. “It, it’s Itokazu–*sensei*.”

“Ah, okay... um, are you alright, Itokazu–*sensei*?”

“Show, show me some proof... proof!” Maki was practically boiling as she snapped back her demand, her temples throbbing as if blood was just about to spout from them like geysers.

“Hmmm...” As the girl tilted her head in thought, they were interrupted by a shrill electronic sound coming out from a pouch on the belt around her waist.



“!” Eris’s face became a bit serious as she touched the bell that hung around the choker-like top portion of her bodysuit. With a large head and a small body... what could only be described as a stuffed animal plushie appeared in mid-air.

(A bear... no, not a bear... right?)

While Kio tilted his head in distraction, Eris went ahead with the plushie and

started a conversation. “Hey, Luros, what’s the matter?”

“Aha, you see.” Speaking somewhat incoherently, the plushie was freaking out. “It’s an emergency. The ship, it’s been found.”

“What? But it was camouflaged, right?”

“Affirmative, but not with active camouflage.”

“How is the situation now?”

“I’ve been wrapped up in some kind of fibre and pulled up to the sea’s surface.”

At that time, Manami pointed round-eyed at the living room television sitting behind Kio. “That... that’s...”

“?” As Kio turned around, Maki, having calmed down a little (after being softened by the cuteness of the plushie that had appeared in the air without warning), also turned her eyes in that direction with her remaining anger.

“Ah!”

“Uh...”

«Just look at that object sparkling in champagne gold!»

Talking excitedly, the reporter on TV was someone who used to be a main anchor but was dropped due to some trouble involving women. Since then, he specialized in programs like “Local Ladies’ Creative Cooking Ideas” and “Regional Volunteer Efforts for Kids to Admire”.

The TV camera zoomed in on the scene behind him where the shiny object caught in a fishing net was just now being hauled up from the water’s surface. With a streamlined body, besides its stubby wings and a bare minimum of mechanical details, it was mostly featureless... regardless, the thing certainly seemed to fit the term ‘spaceship’. Its total length look to be around five meters.

«As could be seen earlier from the image captured by the underwater camera, the object is quite obviously man-made. Also, in light of the message we received two days ago, “We want to come play!” it’s highly likely that intelligent life from another planet has finally, finally made an appearance... isn’t that right Professor Ubusuna?»

The microphone was immediately turned toward a middle-aged gentleman standing beside him.

«The possibility certainly seems high. But there is also the possibility of this being a plot perpetrated by $\bigcirc \times \diamond \triangle$. In short, what I'm saying is that the possibilities are endless... to be frank.»

As the professor tried to continue his half-baked commentary, the announcer forcefully brought the microphone back with the words, "Thank you very much." He then followed up by informing the audience that the salvaged object would be sent to an appropriate location ([MEXT](#)'s research institution) for investigation that would mainly involve non-destructive examination procedures.

"Ah, my ship... it seems to be in trouble." Eris scratched her cheek. "Getting back could become a problem... I guess there's no helping it, Luros."

"Yes, there's no helping it. I think so too."

"In that case, reactivate the system and start program *Ah-24*."

"Roger, *Ah-24* activated. What next?"

"Hmmm... *Heh-11* should do."

"Roger that." With a short arm bent in a salute, the plushie disappeared.

"...uh, is that yours?"

"Yes, it is. It's what I rode in to get here. It can't really do much more than hop around inside the solar system, but I'll be troubled if it just gets hauled off by someone."

"I... guess so..."

"But it's okay because I just gave commands to the ship's navigation system."

Faster than she could finish her words, the announcer raised a shout. «The, the spacecraft!»

The spacecraft, which sparkled in champagne gold, suddenly changed, becoming white. In the next moment, the net that had brought up the ship went slack as the ship softly floated above the sea's surface. As for the net, it somehow slipped right through the hull.

«WE MEAN YOU NO HARM.»

An overly clichéd alien voice arose sounding distorted as if it had gone through an electric fan.

«HOWEVER, SINCE WE DO NOT WISH TO BE DETAINED, WE WILL NOW TAKE OUR LEAVE. PLEASE REFRAIN FROM SEARCHING FOR US.»

The announcer and crews of the surrounding fishing boats were struck dumb in amazement. The cameraman, it seemed, had the same reaction since the camera kept stupidly pointing at their backs instead of conscientiously zooming in on the spacecraft. A blink later and the spacecraft was gone. At the edge of the camera's frame, Kio faintly recognized a tiny dot far away on the coast that appeared and then disappeared in a splash of water. But before his mind could figure out what that signified...

"I, I'm gonna get going... I'm not feeling that well today." With no life left in her voice, Maki turned around. "Uh, Kakazu-*kun*, this matter of living together, this evening... no, evening the day after tomorrow... no, it's fine. Please decide it for yourselves. I, I'm a little bit... not feeling well, so I'm gonna go home and lie down." Wobbling back and forth, the grey-suited figure staggered out through the entranceway and disappeared.

"I, uh, me too. I'm going to head back." Manami said as she was left standing by herself. "But... it's true; you really are an alien from outer space."

"Umm, but I haven't given you any proof yet. Is that okay? ...ah, but I can't make body doubles, I can't phase through walls, and I can't do anything like give off sparks or shoot beams from my eyes."

"It's fine, it's fine. I've already seen plenty."

"?"

"Kio-*chi*, take care." Leaving aside the thoroughly confused Eris, Manami returned to her house as well.



"But, what did you come here for? ...could it be, an invasion?" Kio was now

munching on the giant spam and egg rice balls his mom had prepared earlier. While asking his question, he washed it down with a light miso soup.

“Of course not. We just want to establish friendly contact.” While likewise chowing down on the kombu wrapped spam and egg rice balls, Eris laughed. “If we did something like that, our entire species would be wiped out by the Galactic Sentience Federation.

“...what’s that?”

“It’s a special organization led by the Orsonians, a race that’s evolved to the point where they became spirit lifeforms. They’re really scary, you know... however, normally, they act very kind... they were actually the ones who introduced us to this planet.”

“Really...” Thinking they sounded quite meddlesome, Kio nodded his head anyway. “Speaking of which, what are your people called, Eris?”

“Well, we always just called ourselves ‘Earthlings’, but that could get confusing so we decided to call ourselves ‘Catians’ instead.”

Certainly, considering that their language system was completely the same, it wouldn’t be surprising if they also called their planet ‘Earth’; it would just be confusing for conversation.

“But I’m glad... Earth sure is a nice place. The average temperature is around thirty degrees, it’s not too far away from the star, and each day is twenty-four hours. We can even communicate using the same language here in Japan.”

“Is that so?” Even though Kio was not overly concerned with the world’s realities, the TV would daily report on things like environmental destruction, pollution and war. Thinking about these, he didn’t feel like the Earth was that great.

“When talking about weaknesses, instead of good and evil being determined by each individual’s nature and judgement, religion is the strong deciding factor. I wonder if your scientific development is being influenced and held back by that?”

“Hmm.” Kio lapsed into thought. This carefree-looking girl actually had some thoughtful insight into the things she saw.

“But, that being as it is, the future ahead is still bright!”

“Is that so?”

“Yep, I’m sure of it.” Eris brought another rice ball into her hand while smiling and laughing. Nibbling a bit, she asked, “Um, this... there’s none of that red, chewy, sour stuff in here, right?” while wearing a slightly nervous expression.

“Ah, pickled plum? Don’t worry, my mom doesn’t like her rice balls having pickled plum in them, so we don’t put them in.”

“...thank goodness.” Sighing in relief, the girl bit into the rice ball. “Oh, this [abura miso](#), it’s so yummy~”



“...forget it.”

Returning home, Manami went back into her room on the second floor, shutting the door with her hand behind her back. “Aliens, spacecraft... my life has nothing to do with those kinds of things. Yeah.” She nodded repeatedly. This particular girl’s room was somewhat strange. While there was some girly furniture around, other things were mixed in as well.

Guns, that is.

These guns were not real, of course, but model guns. Included were gas guns and electric guns that looked almost more real than their real steel counterparts – even matching the weight of the originals by having almost all of their parts swapped out piece by piece with metal ones. Calling her a gun enthusiast would be wrong. In her case, the guns were more like the *Government Official Regular Position Exam Study Guide* you might normally see on a bookshelf. They were there for the sake of achieving a splendid outcome for her ‘future plan’.

“That’s right, that’s just how it is.” Muttering to herself, Manami went towards her plain desk and sat down.



“Meeooww♪” Eris let out an involuntary sigh befitting of a girl with cat ears as she rolled around on the tatami mats in the sitting room. “Ahh, stuffing myself and rolling around like this, it feels so purrrfect~”

Facing up after rolling back and forth for a while, the girl stretched widely. “So awesome... Especially since there was a short while after landing on this earth where I couldn’t enjoy these things at all.”

“Come to think of it, when did you arrive here?” Carrying some after-dinner cold barley tea, Kio’s face had reddened somewhat. Rolling around without a care, Eris’s body was quite... no, it was absurdly pretty making her sexiness especially stand out. Although quiet, he was still a 16-year-old boy... well, even though it couldn’t be helped if he thought of various things, he was unwilling to just accept it.

“Hmm, about 8 days ago? Yup.” With a soft moan, Eris stretched herself out again. As she stretched, her huge breasts strained upwards and yet still resisted splaying apart. “Ugh, it was really bad, you know... Even though being dropped off in the mountains was good for avoiding people’s notice, it also meant I had no one to call out to when I had carelessly forgotten my food packages and ended up with an empty stomach. At the same time, headquarters was pressuring me to investigate quickly.”

“You carelessly forgot to pack food...?” Like anyone would be, Kio felt appropriately shocked. For an adventurer heading off to an unknown land, shouldn’t guaranteeing a safe food supply be of maximum priority?

“Yeah.” Eris nodded deeply. “In the end, I had to start thinking of acquiring a local food supply, but... I don’t like killing animals. And besides, I’m a bad shot.” Sitting herself up on the tatami, the girl laughed awkwardly while scratching her head.

“Just as I was seriously thinking that I was going to starve to death, Aura-san... Ah, um, that was a cat-person I happened to meet... Anyway, Aura-san told me where Kio’s group were and said, ‘If it’s those people, you’ll be fine.’”

“A cat-person? Aura?”

“Ah, I’m sorry, it was a cat, not a person.” Laughing merrily and sticking out her tongue, Eris corrected herself. Conversing with a cat – it should, perhaps, be

natural for a girl with cat ears. But still...

“A cat... Aura?” Kio’s eyes went round. “Um, was it a [Scottish Fold](#)... by any chance? Did it have folded ears? The collar has a rune... I mean, a strange character engraved on it and it looks like it’s wearing white [tabi](#) on the ends of its feet.”

“Yeah. I’m not sure what tabi are, but the ends of its feet were white, its ears drooped, and there was a strange character engraved on its collar.”

“That cat... I was wondering where it ran off to. So that’s where.” Kio sighed.

Aura was the name of the cat raised in his house. Since it was a kitten, it always enjoyed wandering off. It was common for it to leave suddenly and first come back up to two weeks later. At first, Kio and the rest of the family would search around desperately, but now it was just “the usual” and they left it alone. Now too, even after it had given directions to Eris, they still didn’t know where it was.

“Haa...”

A strange cat, even as a kitten it would look like a philosopher as it stared off toward some distant place. While that figure gave off a deep impression, this was above and beyond. As its owner, Kio was one part appreciative and one part astonished.

“But, like Aura—*san* said, everyone was really nice. They immediately brought me some food and let me join in the fun. Singing and dancing together... really, it was great... Kio’s mom and dad are really nice people. Kio, too.”

“...thank you.” With mixed feelings, Kio held out a cup containing the cold barley tea to Eris.

“No, the one saying thanks should be me.”

“Come to think of it, I guess that’s right.” Kio laughed.

Eris smiled as well and drank down the barley tea.

“...so, what are your plans for today?”

“Hmm, I don’t have any plans in particular.”

“Then, it might be wrong since you just got here, but I have a quick errand to run... I don’t suppose you could house-sit for me? Just being here is fine. You don’t need to answer the phone, and if anybody comes knocking, just ignore them.”

“...okay. But from what I know, isn’t that a bit different from what it means to house-sit...?”

“Well, your current appearance is kinda...”

“Oh, I see, because I’m an alien from space.” Eris nodded repeatedly to show that she understood. Apparently, she didn’t really think about how much her cat ears and tail stood out, not to mention her body’s proportions.

“You’re welcome to eat anything inside the refrigerator. Just don’t light the stove or anything.” Saying that, Kio thought it sounded a little like someone admonishing an elementary school student. Speaking of which, Kio remembered his elementary school days when the first time he was left to watch over the house on his own his mom delivered a similar speech.

“Got it!” Eris answered cheerfully, raising her hand. Were she to quietly maintain a stern face, she might have looked like a ‘grown up woman’, but it was difficult to see her usual self as being older than Kio.

“Well then, feel free to roll around.” Kio said, feeling his mouth form itself into a broad smile.

“Roger thaaat♪” At this point, Eris turned over onto her stomach, linked her arms together under her head like a pillow and closed her eyes. “Then, Kio–*san*, I’m just going to go ahead and sleep for a bit.”

“Okay... but, is that all right?”

“Yep. Today’s a day off from everything including my investigation.”

“Alright then.” Smiling, Kio left the room.



Heavy steps soon turned into ones full of purpose. That’s right, now was not the time to be shocked. Running to get up the concrete steps, the woman

opened up the door to her place. Laying right at the border where Naha and it's neighbouring city, Tomigusuku, rubbed up against each other, her second floor '2K' (6 tatami, 2 room) apartment. The place, which cost 40,000 yen in rent, was stacked with a forest of bookshelves. In the kitchen, in the rooms – there were books everywhere. While many of the books were related to pedagogy, psychology and computing, there were many novels as well. Then there were many technical and reference books besides. Regarding all these books, they were not just there for decoration. Rather, they had each been read at least twice and would occasionally be pulled out again at random.

The woman threaded her way through the bookshelves and entered her wooden-floored work area. Here, too, with the exception of the closet, all three remaining walls were filled with books. Inside the closet, the only spot clear of bookshelves, a 20 in. monitor sat attached to a PC with a television next to it.

Turning on the monitor, she then fired up her PC. A short time later, "Good morning, Captain." came out in a calm and steady, yet somewhat clumsy male voice. The startup sound was something she had painstakingly set up on her own. She had taken the audio from a past video tape recording of *2001: A Space Odyssey* which she had made when it was broadcast on a New Year late-night television program. After carefully filtering out the background noise, she was left with the voice of the late great voice actor, Kaneuchi Yoshio.

"Morning, HAL." Muttering quietly to herself, she immediately connected to the web. Various messages about things like new email notifications and unplanned events were immediately displayed on the screen, but these were all ignored in favour of starting up a piece of software. It was an online game set in space where one could freely perform trades and wage war. While it had already fallen from the height of its popularity, there was still a deeply rooted fan base.

"It's so bogged down." Seeing the slow movement of her player character (which held the position of a minister's secretary on a planetary cruiser), she could immediately tell how crowded the server was. And no wonder. Everyone should have seen that coverage and, even more so, it was summer vacation right now. Middle and high school students, the largest free-spending and time-wasting portion of society, would one-by-one head to the internet in order to exchange their information and views as quickly as possible. (The former aside,

the latter was just for getting in on the fun.)

“...bah, come on!” Expressing her irritation by moving her optical mouse around, she waited for her character to enter the conference room. Immediately upon entering, she opened up, impatiently, a window and typed in the keyword for the chat room. Jumping across from there, she entered in yet another keyword. After repeating this several times, she finally entered the top secret locked down chat room.

Already, her character had been completely covered in a triangular hat that went over her whole head and an ankle-length robe. While the *clothes swap* was completely on the character side, not hers, and was only supposed to be a joke at the level of self mockery, it ended up signifying something else – that of a mood change.

«Hello, Ender here.»

She started by sending her greetings.

«Hello, Ender–*san*.»

For each colleague who had entered already, she greeted them one by one and received their individual responses.

«The TV broadcast, did you see it?»

«I saw it.»

Another group member entered the conversation.

«It’s too bad. If it wasn’t like that, I’d be more excited.»

«Agreed.»

«About that... I saw, or rather, I actually met the person.»

The moment the enter key was pressed, the chat room exploded.

«What do you mean?»

«Did you talk to them?»

«Where was it?» «Did it really end up looking like that?» «Did it really meow and stuff?»

The chat log quickly filled up with comments flowing at a staggering pace.

«She did look like that, but she actually spoke Japanese.»

«!»

Once again, the chat room became noisy with lots of loud comments. Pulling herself together, she provided the information she had piece by piece. With a measure of passion, a declaration was then made.

«Unacceptable. Having this kind of existence be our first contact partner is unacceptable.»

«Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.»
«Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.»
«Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.»
«Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.»
«Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.» «Agreed.»

«If possible, please lend me some people. Don't we have any comrades within the Marine Corps in Okinawa?»

«There aren't any in the Marine Corps, unfortunately.» The chat room's leader regretfully typed in his answer.

«The Marine Corps has nothing but muscles-for-brains idiots and anime otakus.»

«However, we should have some people in the Navy and Air Force that can be used.»

«In that case, go and contact those people.»

«Understood... Then, how will you move, Ender-san.»

«I, as well, will involve myself directly in carrying out the plan.»

With a feeling of pride, she hit the enter key.

«Understood... then we'll proceed like this.»

«I will make a sincere effort to prevent civilian casualties.» Forestalling anyone else's comment, she quickly posted her message.

«Do your best, Ender-san.»

«Don't give up, Ender–*san*.»

«You can do it.»

While receiving their sendoffs, she sent her parting words.

«Everything for the sake of a beautiful contact.»

«For a beautiful contact.»

«For a beautiful contact.»

«For a beautiful contact.»

«For a beautiful contact.»

Chapter 3: 'Company' Girls

'Company' Girls



May 25, 200A — Tokyo, somewhere in the government district.

"...so, what's the decision from up top?"

"If possible, they would like them gone, and without leaving a trace."

"Which is what we're here for... but, wouldn't 'Momiji' be good enough? I mean, isn't that place her 'standby location'? And, most importantly, aren't the CIA already moving?"

"Don't worry about it. It's fine as long as we don't get overtaken. Her orders aren't to capture, but to make statements and warnings her priority."

"But will she do as she's told? That thing's a real hot-head. Whether or not she'll pick up on the fine nuance there... also, do we go with the somewhat reduced strength 6 squads, or 3..."

"That, well, it can't be helped. The other guys almost all got sent to the hospital during that previous mess. Besides, 'Devil's Luck Momiji' should be able to handle things. With that costume and those abilities, her camouflage is good enough to not worry about her identity leaking."

"True, it's 'Devil's Luck Momiji' after all."

"But the real issue here is that 'Location: Okinawa' part."

"...that's true."



"What? Teacher said we were free to do whatever we wanted?" Inside the school club room, the Film Club president cocked his head.

Incidentally, because it was summer vacation, everyone was wearing their casual clothes.

“How rare for her, that Itokazu-sensei.”

“Well, at least the noisy hindrance is gone.”

The vice president and a second-year male student nodded their agreement.

“Oh yeah. The most important thing is fun after all. When filming a scene, it’s better to just shoot rather than trying to get it perfect. I mean, with digital, we can keep shooting as much as we want.”

“...about that, it’d be best to decide now what we want to get done. If we let Teacher put the plan together, it won’t even be a bit fun or interesting.”

Any more and it would become a teacher put-down convention, so, with a bitter smile, the president turned toward a more constructive topic. “That’s right, we need to try out the light meters from FISC on a steady lighting setup, but shooting the breeze and having fun trying out all sorts of new shots and angles is important too, for sure.”

Recognizing it as well, the vice president unfurled a notebook and started taking down the discussion. “For sure, for sure. Oh, and there’s a note here for testing out the use of mobile phones... do the first-years have any ideas? It doesn’t need to be anything specific. Maybe like the last movie we watched, a scene like that, might’n it be possible to shoot something like that, maybe... but then, something like bullet time from *The Matrix* is out of the question. There’s just no budget for it.”

Having said that, the first-years thought about it a little, and then immediately several people’s hands went up... it could be called a virtue of the president to achieve such an obedient reaction.

“Um, that, that thing, maybe, where you track a person’s movement with the camera. And I’d like to try some things like dolly shots and long takes.”

“Ah, in that case, as long as there’s string and board and some guts, it should be possible.”

“Ah, well then, me too... I’d like to try something like filming a car tire spinning

as the car vrooms off... would that be overdoing it? ”

“That one... guts and courage, I guess. For now...”

“Ah, I...” Kio raised his hand as well. “Um, that... what’s it called... that thing often done in suspense films? You know, where the subject stays stable in the foreground while the background vrooms out into the distance.”

“Ah, the *Vertigo* effect.”

“Yeah, that’s what I want to do.”

“Yep, yep.” The vice president’s face had gradually started looking hopeful, like a grandchild asking their grandfather for the Christmas present they want, while writing down the various things in the notebook and adjusting the schedule.

“Come to think of it, if we’re taking shots of people, who do we have for the model?”

“If it’s just an hour, then someone from inside the club...”

“That just seems too close for comfort, so can’t we rope someone in from outside?”

“I suppose... Hey, first years, know anyone? A girl would be best.”

“Kio, didn’t you have a childhood friend or something?”

Alongside, another first grader smacked their fist.

“Kinjou Manami-chan, wasn’t it?”

“She’s quite the beauty, too.”

“No, that’s, wait, hold on...”

The president laughed while watching Kio getting flustered over the one-sided discussion going on around him.

“Alright, Kakazu-kun, bring her!”

“It’s an event, an event! Go raise the childhood friend flag!”

As his fellow club members started ganging up on him, raining down their own thoughts, Kio started waving his hands around. “Pl-Please stop with the stupid commentary; this isn’t some manga or game, you know!!”

“What, no good?”

“O-of course! I mean, that side has some issues to think of, too.”

“Is that right?”

“I mean, with Uncle being on a business trip, it’s not like she can come along with our club on the training camp! And to begin with, it seems like Manami-chan already has a boyfriend.”

“It was just a joke, buddy — a joke. Relax, Kio.” While the vice-president spoke, the president laughed.

“Well, it can’t be helped. We’ll just have to figure something out.”

Hearing these words, Kio sighed in relief.

“Ohh, so Kinjou already got a boyfriend.” A classmate with an aloof attitude, 17-year-old Fukuhara, spoke.

“Someone named Jack. Recently, she’s seemed really happy talking on the phone with him.”

“Come to think of it. Kinjou’s father works at the base, doesn’t he?”

“She must have met someone while over there, then.”

With somewhat bitter-sweet thoughts, Kio turned his eyes toward the clubroom window.

(Well, I did think that things wouldn’t work out so smoothly.)

The summer sky stretched across the horizon. Even while thinking like that, when he first heard about it, he felt strangely disappointed and went around the whole day in a daze that he couldn’t explain. Speaking of which, it was around that time when he started being able to resist Manami’s sharp tongue.



“Haa~” Sitting up on her heels, Eris stared lazily at the TV. The picture was split into 30 segments with the channel numbers rotating in each of them. “How nice... there’s plenty of entertainment, too...”

Spread out in front of her were the TV guide, the remote and the manual for the CS tuner, as well as a cake platter with salted rice crackers on it (different from those found in Osaka, these came in cylinders). Next to that, turmeric tea had been filled into a pitcher, and from there into a Ryukyu glass cup. Besides these, old newspapers had been spread on top of the tatami mats so that any crumbs that fell could easily be cleaned up. Having the splendid appearance of a couch potato, the girl with cat ears and a tail was flumped down horizontally.

Certainly, Kio had said “make yourself at home”, but it seems like this alien had followed his advice without any reserve.

“Meowrrr~” Her eyes narrowing into slits, she freely stretched out her body and looked lazily at the television. On it, a black and white image was showing someone sporting the now mostly extinct ‘good man with a bitter past’ look. While running around in some wasteland somewhere, the casually dressed man was killing people with wild abandon. There were also some companions: a youth wearing a white scarf and light-coloured clothing and a middle-aged man with a face like a raccoon. These were likewise felling the mob around them.

“...a period drama, I guess...?”

While looking absently at the screen, a chime sounded.

“Coming!” Suddenly remembering what she was told, that ‘it would be best if you don’t respond to the phone or visitors’, Eris quickly threw her hands over her mouth.

“Oh, someones here?” With those words, the front door rattled open. “Oi, Kio?”

“...” Crossing her arms and thinking for a bit, Eris reluctantly came out to the entranceway.

“Oh, it’s you, huh.” Noticing her was Kio’s uncle, Miyagi Yuichi. Sporting slicked back hair combed down with pomade, a mustache and a suntanned body, he was wearing a bright red palm tree printed Hawaiian shirt, white Bermuda shorts and sports sandals. On a main street he might look like a suspicious guide, while on a side street like a suspicious... well, specifically, like someone from the dangerous part of society who might deal in trafficking things like white powder and ladies who go ‘ooh’ and ‘aaah’. “Is Kio around?”

“Ah, um, he went out for a bit. But it seems he’ll be back before noon.”

“Oh... I see.” With a look like he had missed his mark, Yuichi crouched down in the entrance. “So, how’d it go? Any problems?”

“Well, nothing in particular.”

“I see, that’s fine then, but... what are you up to?”

“Ah, no, that’s... well, that is, nothing really...”

“I see... um, Eris-chan, was it?”

“Ah, yes.”

“Why did you come to Okinawa?”

“Well, just some reason or other. I wanted to, so I did... eheheh.” Kneeling down, Eris scratched her head apologetically. Meanwhile, her tail moved around restlessly.

“Will you be staying here for a while?”

“Yep. There’s still some work left to do.”

“Is that so... well then, what kind of work?”

“It’s a job investigating things.”

“How dreadful, and when it’s this hot.” With those words, another person passed through the entranceway.

“Oho, don’t you seem sprightly?”

With pure white hair done up in the Okinawan [kampu](#) style, an old woman came bounding in energetically. Her thin, rough and bony hands gave the impression of having experienced life to the fullest. Hanging from one was a plastic bag from some supermarket. Inside, something the size of a fax paper roll could be seen wrapped up in aluminum foil and put inside a separate poly bag.

“Miyagi Yuichi, eh?” The old woman, with unbelievably glossy skin for someone over 100 years old, nodded her head with a smile.

“Yes, that’s right, grandma; I’m Yuichi, the child of Miyagi Eiko’s second son.” Yuichi bowed his head politely.

“Mhmn, mhmn.” Smiling and nodding her head, the old woman continued into the house.

“Ah, um, ex-excuse me.”

“It’s alright. It’s all fine.” With those kinds of words, the old woman briskly entered the kitchen without any hesitation, opened the refrigerator and stored the plastic bag inside.

“Hey, miss.” Closing the door of the refrigerator, the old woman spoke to Eris. “When Kio gets back, let him know that there’s ‘yakiniku’ in the refrigerator”

“Ah, okay.”

“Ah, now then, some barley tea would be nice.”

“Ah... um... ye-yes.” While hesitating a bit, after thinking about what Kio had said, that she could ‘eat and drink whatever she liked’, Eris figured that it was probably okay. After all, this old woman seemed to be an elder in Kio’s family.

“Hey, Miyagi Yuichi, wouldn’t you also like a drink?”

“Ah, yes, please and thanks.” Acting like a guy who makes himself even more at home in someone else’s, Yuichi took two Ryukyu glass cups out of the cupboard – the kind that looked full of tiny bubbles.

“Um, if it’s tea, I already made some; it’s in the other room. You’re welcome to it.”

“Ah, is that so... well then.”

Like that, the three people followed each other over. At this point, Eris finally noticed something. Apparently, these two had nothing to rush around to, in which case... “Um...” Timidly, Eris called out. “Actually, there were some various things I was hoping to hear about...”



“Ah, Futaba-san.” Inside the club room building’s humid corridor, Kio called out to a girl with long hair reaching down to her waist. A first-year in the Modern Novel Research Club, Futaba Aoi flinched, her shoulders shaking, looked

startled. Turning toward Kio, she immediately breathed a sigh of relief. Her skin was white to the point where her veins seemed lightly visible. Wearing large oval-framed glasses that suited her beautifully, Aoi held the appearance of a traditional book girl seldom found in Okinawa.

Actually, her family name itself marked her as someone not originally from Okinawa, but that had used the chance afforded by entering senior high school to transfer over. For the quiet book girl type, Okinawa was a tough place to be with its mostly sports-minded populous. As her outer appearance would suggest, her body was rather frail and so she would constantly take time off from school to go to the hospital. Perhaps because of this, she was much more a target for pity rather than being left out. With a portion of the male students, on the other hand, she had acquired an ardent fan base... Naturally, this was something she herself was clueless about.

“Hello, um... Kakazu-kun.”

“Hello.” In his hand, Kio held out a plastic bag from a newly opened bookstore. “Here, the DVD and tape I borrowed last time.”

“Um... yeah.” Wearing a light blue dress, Aoi acknowledged it by nodding her head and timidly accepted the bag.

With natural movements, the two started walking side-by-side down the corridor. Through a window that was left open, a wind blew that caused Aoi's long hair to sway.

“Um... how was it?”

“Right, well, the scenes in [Koyaanisqatsi](#) were interesting. Looking at the way the continuously meandering streets were filmed, I felt like there was more meaning there somewhere. [Gaia Symphony](#) surprised me even more.”

“...” Smiling brightly, Aoi nodded her head repeatedly.

“...um, I'm glad... that you enjoyed watching them, Kakazu-kun...”

“Yeah, they were interesting... after all, these sorts of videos and DVDs that only show the environment are quite easily overlooked.” While walking, Kio's frayed nerves from the hubub before had strangely managed to calm down, and a somewhat peaceful mood descended over him. “Then, those movies... would

you mind lending me some again?”

“Um, then, this time... would some regular movies be okay... ?”

“Yeah. That’s right... last time I borrowed *Rainbow Kids*. Are there maybe other films by the same director?”

“Um, if you’d like that... then, I could bring *Westward Desperado* and *Warring Clans*, and maybe *Age of Assassins* as well...?”

“By Chaplin?” Recently, since he started talking to her and building his own collection, Kio was able to pull something out from his limited knowledge of film. In response, Aoi smiled and shook her head.

“Um, no... that one just shares the same Japanese title...”

“Is, is that so... sorry.”

“Um, there’s no need to apologize... Compared with ones like Kurosawa Akira, Okamoto Kihachi is just a minor name.”

“Y-yeah.” Sighing relievedly, Kio felt a clear, peaceful feeling from her soft manner. While he was fine with his childhood friend, Manami, it was perhaps due to Manami’s nature or his introverted personality that Kio wasn’t very good at talking with other females. Aoi was one of the few exceptions.

Exiting out of the club room building, the midsummer sun’s rays pierced down on them like rain. Squinting reflexively, Kio brought his hand up to his forehead to act as a visor and waited for his eyes to adjust... Aoi, situated close behind him by the school entrance, similarly waited for her eyes to adjust.

“Ah, um...Kakazu-kun.”

“What is it, Futaba-san?”

“Um... today, are you free... at all?”

“Huh? Ah, yeah. I’m free... I think?” Flashing through his mind along with a faint anxiety was a mini cartoon version of Eris doing a strange dance. He decided, however, that it should still be okay for an hour or two.

“That’s great...” The girl gave off a sweet smile. It was a smile unsuited to the light of summer, but rather fleeting, like the [night-blooming cereus](#). “Um, in that

case, I was hoping you would go with me to buy DVDs... since I just got my allowance.”

“Sure.”

Just as they were leaving from the school gate, however, that just-made appointment had to be scrapped. Next to the two of them, a black Nissan President passing by suddenly screeched to a halt. With the power window open, a man of about 40 looking like a serious corporate office-worker stuck his face out from the hot interior.

“Hey, if it isn’t Futaba Aoi-chan.”

For a moment, Kio saw Aoi’s shoulder tremble and her face tighten.

“Ah, Uncle Endou.”

“Are you heading back now? If you’d like a ride, I can drive you by your home.”

“Um...” Aoi’s expression showed that she was clearly flustered. Kio’s intuition told him that this uncle held quite some importance to her.

Meanwhile, in Kio’s mind, a scene from a cartoon played that he had previously borrowed from Aoi. In the short animation, *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, the story shows how the pupil carelessly used magic while the master was away causing all sorts of trouble in its wake. This time, instead of the black mouse from america that’ll be copyrighted into the 22nd century, Eris’s face had been inserted.

(Hey, I wonder, could this be guidance from God that I had better “return home quickly”?)

Thinking that, the boy responded with a quick “It’s fine.” in a way that matched his introverted personality.

“Um... yeah, alright... I’m sorry...”

“It’s fine. When it’s convenient again, give me a call.”

“Um... your mobile number... is it still the same?”

“Yep.”

“In that case, um... how about the day after tomorrow?”

“Yeah, that’ll probably be fine, I think.” In order to lift her apologetic feelings, the boy smiled brightly for her.



“Did I get in the way?” Gripping the car’s steering wheel, Endou asked. Peeling off the ‘friendly face’ look he had previously shown, a mask-like lack of expression was all that was left.

“...” Glancing past the rear-view mirror, Aoi looked toward Kio’s retreating figure as he stood there and closed her eyes.

“No way, it can’t be that I’ve exposed your true self, have I?” Opening a normally concealed part of the backrest to expose a hidden compartment, white fingers plucked out a thoroughly worn Zippo, lighting it.

“...isn’t this a contract violation?” A quiet voice leaked from the girl’s lips.

“Well, it couldn’t be helped. It’s an emergency mission.” Endou’s face remained passive. “But, this sure is interesting. If he were to learn who you really are, I wonder what sort of face he would make.”



Aoi’s eyes narrowed... down to a razor’s edge. Tchk! Almost simultaneously, an enormous revolver appeared grasped in Aoi’s hand out of nowhere. It was a 500 Magnum built by Smith & Wesson. Among all the tumult of its release, marketed as “literally, the world’s most powerful handgun”, it was also said that, “to have a gun this powerful, what are you shooting at?” Hard as concrete, it’s huge barrel that even a pro wrestler could comfortably stick their thumb into pressed

tightly into the scruff of Endou's neck.

"It's no matter." Her white teeth gleamed. "I'd just need to change schools... but, before then, I'll be killing you." Indifferently, the girl continued, "It won't be for some complicated reason like you interfering with my mission or budget concerns. I'll kill you simply because I feel like killing."

The girl's tone was exceedingly calm, causing an eerie pressure to weigh down inside the vehicle that would cause, never mind thugs, even upper-class yakuza to shudder. Understandably, the skin on Endou's face cramped up.

"If, if you shoot me, the car..." Recognizing that he had gone somewhat overboard and was unable to backtrack, Endou struggled with all he could. However...

"There's no need to worry." Aoi responded coolly. "I'll most likely emerge without a single scratch. I *am* 'Devil's Luck Momiji' after all." Her graceful thumb gently cocked the enormous hammer. "That is, shall we try adding yet another episode to the legend?"

Cold sweat from his temple ran down in a straight line on Endou's face.

While staring at that sweat, with dry, glassy eyes, the girl pulled the trigger.

The sudden sound of a screeching break reverberated.

Endou, having fallen forward with his face against the steering wheel, was pulled back by the seatbelt until the back of his head struck the headrest.

"Ahahahaha." The girl let out a loud, monotone laugh. Amidst the G-forces pulled during the sudden braking, and with her posture strained holding that giant revolver in one hand, she had yet to even tremble.

"That was a joke." Immediately withdrawing the smile from her face, muttering while lightly waving her hand, the large form of the silver revolver disappeared into thin air. Apport: this uncommon body technique rivalled her 'devil's luck' as a special ability she had.

"So, what are the details for this job?" While, abruptly having changed to a good mood, the voice of the girl drizzled over Endou from behind. Taking out a white handkerchief from his breast pocket, he wiped at the copious amount of

sweat that had gushed onto his face.

“Sa-same as always... the removal of a persona non grata.”

“Time frame?”

“As early as possible... This time, the CIA is moving too. The target is designated as upper A-class, spare no expense.”

“I see.”

Futaba Aoi... in actuality, a Japanese Immigration Bureau Special Inquiry Officer, code-named ‘Momiji’, formed an indifferent smile onto her mouth.



While prudent in a sense, Manami’s studying in preparation for the civil service examination would normally be much too early. Coming to a break, she had gone to the convenience store for a change of pace; on coming home again, her mother called out to her. “Manami, Janis-san called. She said she’d try again later on the computer.”

“Okay.” Nodding, Manami immediately went up to her room on the second floor, turned on the computer, connected to the net and put headphones over her head. Right away, an incoming net-phone call icon appeared with the window popping up. In order to increase the speed of the connection, the other party wasn’t being shown in real time.

“Hi, Manami, doing well?”

“Yep, how are things over there, Jack?” Adding a smile to the name ‘Jack’, it was what Manami called Janis Alectos Carotenas Karinato. This excessively long name was a result of her mixed blood ties to a maritime family from the Greek part of the Mediterranean.

Normally introducing herself as Janis, this was also what other people would normally call her. If she met someone who gave her a terrible impression, however, she would purposely introduce herself with her full name and demand that they call her with it. Only if she met someone who gave her a really good impression would she go by the collection of her initials: ‘JACK’. 23 years old, she

was a colleague of Manami's father. Since starting their association when she was a teen, quite some time had already passed.

"There's nothing interesting here." An impression of helpless shrugging was transmitted through the speaker that had been installed right when the computer was purchased. "My role here as a fire starter isn't getting its turn at all." Her American conversation partner gave out a theatrical sigh. "Manami, too, if you enter our 'company' later, you should start out in the white-collar wing to see how things are first."

"No way." Manami smiled wryly at her close friend. "I absolutely want to do the same as like what you're doing, Jack."

"No, no... we're all dinosaurs going extinct, disappearing in a Godzilla funeral procession sooner or later. Manami, it'd be good for you to be a bit more tactical in how you live your life."

"Hmm, I wonder..." Tightly hugging and burying her face in a couch cushion, Manami's expression turned sober. "Well then, you weren't just calling to chat today, right?"

"Ah, you figured it out?"

"Yep, because, Jack, around this time, you'd generally be calling my cell."

"Ach!" An image of the Caucasian girl smacking her palm against her forehead while putting out her tongue out appeared easily in Manami's mind... Ever since several years ago, after watching an old [rakugo](#) performance on Manami's family television, it had become her favourite pose.

"Is it job related?"

"Yeah. What's your daddy up to?"

"Dad? ...he'll still be in the Philippines for a while. An email came earlier saying something about having to dealing with turmoil there for the next little while because of the election... this, you didn't hear about it?"

"Oh... I just flew back to the States from Germany and haven't been informed of anything... then, I guess I can't help but look elsewhere for an assistant, huh?"

"Can I help out?"

“Hmmn...” After a worried several seconds... “Well, there’s quite the time pressure this time around and, on the other hand, any danger happening seems unlikely. So, Manami, I suppose I could accept your help?”

“Lucky!” With splendid timing, a snap rang out from Manami’s fingers.

“Make sure the report is written up perfectly.”

“Of course.”

With a ding, a thumbs-up fist icon was sent from Jack.

“Hooray!” Her face beaming with joy, Manami jumped up from her chair. “So, what kind of work is it?”

“Ah...” Not knowing how to explain, Jack suddenly lapsed into silence. “Um... that is, the target sounds completely stupid, so it’s a little hard for me to find the right words for it...”

“?”

“It’s about capturing an alien who’s got cat ears and a tail.”

“Huh?” Manami’s chin dropped. “An extraterrestrial sporting cat ears and a tail?”

“An *alien*.”

“No, well, though the meaning’s the same... if that’s the case, um...” Thinking a little, Manami wiped the dust from the CCD camera sitting on top of the computer and started it up while heading for the window.

“What is it?”

“Ah, well, I’ll keep an eye out.” Manami mixed in a sigh while operating the CCD camera, zooming in across the way. At the same time, she turned on the directional microphone that was built in to it.

“I’m home...”

“Ah, Kio-san, welcome back!♪”

Across the low fence and over to the parlour room, Kio was entering and being greeted by a redhead with yellow streaks in her bangs... Reflected through the camera and onto the computer screen was the figure of that girl who happened

to be sporting cat ears and a tail.

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